
What about Parent-directed Testing?

Let's sort out norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests first. The former only compares students to each other, and the latter is intended to evaluate mastery of specific skills or content. Standardized tests are given to groups, classrooms, school districts, etc., and individualized tests are designed for one or a few.

One of the most important reasons for testing is to evaluate strengths and weaknesses and adjust accordingly. The one most qualified to choose, schedule, and evaluate test results is the educator! Judging progress suggests having a baseline (where you started), a goal (what you hoped to accomplish), and a measurement (what you actually accomplished). Instead of measuring success in learning, sometimes results will reflect problems with scheduling, illness, effort, expectations, curriculum, even diet, sleep, and stress. The day-to-day hands-on educator is the right choice for this job.

What benefit is there to choosing standardized, norm-referenced tests? They have become increasingly controversial among public school educators themselves, since they serve only to compare your child to others. They cannot measure excellence! Are the goals and success of public education your standard? At the same time, there *are* a few helpful results provided by these tests.

TEST is the first word in TESTimony. When presenting the effectiveness of home-based education, standardized and normed test results provide the basis for statistical studies. The larger and more diverse the group sample is, the more accurate the results are considered. Home schoolers love to remind themselves and the world (and especially lawmakers) that student scores average thirty percentile points above the national average. Only the standardized and normed tests provide that information.

Second, these tests are often used to determine admissions, academic scholarships, and honors. For example, the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) is the only qualifier for the National Merit Scholarship. *Eta Sigma Alpha*, the national homeschool honor society, and Mu Eta Sigma, the national math honor society for homeschoolers, both require a minimum score on a nationally recognized test.

Third, since many of our students are headed for a culture of comparison by testing, they may prove a useful guide to reasonable expectations. You can get a general idea of how your students will perform in future tests, and learn effective ways of presenting their strengths. You may want to add a portfolio of above-average work to balance average test scores.

Finally, along with an excellent education, the best way to insure the highest scores is practice. Excellent test taking skills and strategy may be taught, i.e. practicing timed tests, adequate bubble-darkening, to guess or not to guess, educated guessing, time management, etc; but this practice does improve performance. Experiencing the distractions and the stress are practice, too! CAPE always recommends group, standardized, norm-referenced testing for the sake of the experience- it is good preparation for more testing!



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